



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**JOE STRAUS**  
**SPEAKER**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2011

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**OPENING DAY ADDRESS BY SPEAKER JOE STRAUS, 82ND LEGISLATURE**

**AUSTIN---** Full transcript of Speaker Straus' remarks:

*Opening Day Address by Speaker Joe Straus*  
*82<sup>nd</sup> Legislature*  
*Texas House of Representatives*  
*Tuesday, January 11, 2011*  
*As Delivered*

Thank you all very much. Thank you, Patricia. I have some eyeglasses here you can borrow anytime.

Thank you, Chief Justice Jefferson. Thank you for being here to administer this oath, and Madame Secretary - Hope, thank you for chairing our proceedings today. Both are proud San Antonians like me, and dear friends. Welcome to all state and federal officials, families, and our fellow Texans who have joined us here today. You honor the House of Representatives with your presence.

Governor Perry is expected to arrive shortly. We look forward to your arrival, and thank you for your service starting in the House, then as presiding officer of the Senate, and now, as the longest-tenured Governor in our state's history.

The Texas House of Representatives looks forward to working with you, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, and the Members of the Texas Senate to achieve our shared goals for the best interests of the people we all represent. Together, we will keep Texas strong, secure, a great place to do business, live and raise a family.

To my colleagues in the Texas House, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your friendship and trust. I am truly humbled by your overwhelming support for my re-election as your Speaker. Together, we can and we will faithfully fulfill the solemn Oaths of Office we have all taken today. To Rob, Senfronia, Drew, Pete, Beverly and Byron, thank you for your extraordinarily kind words. I will do my very best to live up to them, and I promise that I will once again exercise the responsibilities of this office fairly, judiciously and with respect.



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The value of respect is a lesson I learned at an early age and for that, I want to thank my parents. For my sisters and me, our Mother and Dad identified fundamental values of faith, respect, responsibility, honesty, and through their lives and example, an unwavering commitment of service to others. I thank them today for that and for their love and support.

My wife, Julie, is the greatest blessing in my life. When we met, she was working for Secretary James Baker as an assistant in the Reagan Administration. She outranked me then and she still outranks me now at our House where she is the powerful chairman of all of our committees. Julie and I have been given two great gifts: our wonderful daughters. Robyn and Sara, I'm very proud of you, and I love you.

I know all the Members of the House join me in thanking the people of Texas for giving us the privilege and the opportunity to serve. We thank all our families for making sacrifices that allow us to be here. We appreciate your love, support, encouragement and counsel.

Legislative spouses are often left alone to keep our households running while we serve in this House. It's not an easy task. Though I have heard from several legislative wives who shall go unnamed that sometimes more gets done when we are not around! For so many of us, our families inspire our service. We want to leave a better Texas for our children and their children.

This is a day of great purpose and meaning for each of us. To those members who have just taken the oath of office for the first time, you have become part of a great institution where ordinary Texans do extraordinary things by serving causes greater than self. You have become part of a grand tradition of public service, and we all share in the responsibility of upholding it.

I regret that one of our greatest role models and a fine servant of this Institution is no longer with us. This House will not be the same without our friend, the late Representative Edmund Kuempel. To Birdie, Margaret, Michelle and the rest of the Kuempel Family, including our newest colleague, his son John, we embrace you and mourn the passing of a great man. No one did more to bring a spirit of civility and unity and a great sense of humor to this House!

He was a sterling example of how enjoying the work we do here leads us to do a better job for the people of Texas. Edmund believed the members who served with him were colleagues not enemy combatants.

We have differences of philosophy, and Party, but we are all Texans first. With that always in mind, as I promised when I first became Speaker two years ago, I'll do my best to empower members so that they can do what is right for their constituents and for the people of Texas.



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I know that in recent weeks Members of the House have withstood threats, harassment, and attempts at intimidation because of the fair and respectful way in which you want this House to operate. Division, threats of retribution, attacks on people's religious beliefs, and distortions of people's records have no place in this House. Members....Members, I hope you will work with me to make the Texas House a place where decent and honorable people want to come and serve our state. A place where we can learn from the differences that make up our great state without letting them divide us.

I believe how we govern matters. I want Texans to look at the House and see leaders who can debate the most contentious issues of the day in a spirit of respect and civility. I want our citizens to know that the rules of the people's House are not subject to the whims of the chair or the pressure of powerful special interests. This House is where Truth rules, and where Reason prevails.

The will of the House should guide this House. And the will of the House does not begin in the Speaker's office. It begins in the homes and office buildings, on the farms and in the cities, in the suburbs and in the high tech centers. It begins with the 25 million people who are proud to call themselves Texans. These are the people who sent us here and if we fail to respect each other, we fail to respect them.

Every member of this House deserves to be heard and have a voice, to contribute his or her best because every member was sent here by the people of Texas. In the months ahead, we will face tough issues from balancing the budget, to the always difficult job of redistricting. Yet we also face a challenge as great as improving education, securing our border and creating jobs. The challenge to restore people's confidence in public service.

A recent study from the Pew Center found that "just 22 percent say they can trust the government in Washington, among the lowest measures in half a century". That same study indicated that "rising criticism was not limited to the federal government".

We can rebuild trust by the way we conduct ourselves and the way we treat others. We will disagree at times, because we are passionate about the principles we hold dear, but we can choose to make our arguments constructive – rather than destructive. We can rebuild trust by setting high ethical standards, by being transparent, and always making government accountable to the people it serves. We can rebuild trust by making Texas state government live within its means. In November's election, the people of Texas made it clear: they want a more conservative government that is limited and fiscally responsible. We can rebuild trust by conducting ourselves in ways that Washington might learn from.



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Our state faces many challenges, but is blessed with even more opportunities. None of us here would want to trade places with legislators in any other state. Texas continues to be the place where businesses want to locate and expand, where people want to raise their families and realize their dreams.

Great challenges require great leaders. Together, we will work for a Texas that continues to be America's frontier of innovation and opportunity. My favorite Texas historian happens to also be my constituent, T.R. Fehrenbach, and he wrote in his epic book "Lone Star": "Men who exist get overrun by men who act." Men and women of the Texas House, we were sent here to act and to act on behalf of the people.

We may not all share the same ideology, but we share a common identity: we are all Texans. We have inherited a birthright of independence, a spirit of boldness, a vision of what is possible. The great promise of this state is inclusive. It belongs to all who work hard, respect the rules, and persevere.

The men and women who are remembered beyond their years are not those who sow the seeds of discord, but those who plant for a future they may never see. May the laws we write reflect an understanding of the best that Texas can be, not only today, but tomorrow and for decades to come.

I am grateful to start this new session with each of you. May God bless the Great State of Texas, and always keep Her brave and strong. Thank you.

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